



THIS WEEK'S PROGRAM

April 21, 2026

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Charlotte- Mecklenburg Police Chief Estella Patterson

by **Susie Masotti**

Charlotte Rotary Club was pleased to welcome Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Chief of Police, Estella Patterson as this week's guest speaker. **Dena Diorio**, retired Mecklenburg County Manager, introduced Estella to the guests gathered. Dena commented that Charlotte-Mecklenburg welcomed Estella as our new Chief of Police on December 1, 2025. In accepting the position, Estella returned to Charlotte after serving 25 years with CMPD and 3 ½ years with Raleigh. She brings passion and commitment to public service and focuses on reducing violent crime and disorder, enhancing community engagement, and improving employee morale in CMPD. Estella began her career in 1996 as a member of the 123rd recruit class of CMPD. She served in a variety of roles, including trainer, patrol sergeant, division commander, and internal affairs commander. She was promoted to deputy chief in 2019. In August of 2021, she was selected as chief of the Raleigh Police Department until moving back home to Charlotte. Estella has served our country as a member of the US Army Reserve, completing combat tours in Kosovo and Iraq, and was the recipient of the Army Commendation Medal. She earned her Bachelor of Science degree in political science from UNC-Charlotte and her Master of Science in Criminal Justice from the University of Oklahoma. She is a graduate of the FBI National Academy and attended the Senior Management Institute of Police.

After thanking Dena for a wonderful introduction, Estella thanked the gathered Rotarians and guests for having her speak at a Rotary meeting.

Estella reiterated that she spent 25 years growing as a law enforcement officer

through the ranks of CMPD before moving to Raleigh for a short stint, before returning home, and she is glad to be back. Returning to her family and her church family, she, of course, wants Charlotte to be a safe place to live and work.

Estella has three areas of focus: (1) Violent Crime, (2) Community Engagement, and (3) Morale of the Organization.

Regarding violent crime, Estella wants everyone like her own Mother to be able to go out for a walk and feel safe. She is proud that we have seen a reduction in violent crime of 8%, property crime by 15%, and the overall crime rate down by 15%. By putting officers out in your neighborhood and getting to know the areas they serve, she feels not only will this help deter crime, but make you feel safe at the same time. CMPD kicked off a new initiative in uptown called "Operation Safe Season". The NCALE, FBI, and ATF have all joined in on this effort. Each month in 2026, there is an event bringing the focus of this initiative – reducing violent crime and enhancing safety. The first event in uptown was a success, and similar events were held in Northend in January, in Steele Creek in February, back in uptown in March, and on the West Side in April.

The reduction in violent crime brings with it partners within the community – District Attorney Merriwether and US Attorney Ferguson. Both have been the best partners and are serious about weeding out crime. When you talk about violent crime, you're especially talking about young people. No one in CMPD wants to ruin a young life. CMPD has created a unit that focuses on youth violent offenders via mentoring, talking with them, and working with them regularly. However, parents need to be held accountable for their children. Just this past week, there was a fight as Estella was leaving Truist Field after a game that involved juveniles. The offenders were caught and cited, and then their parents were also issued citations. Everyone must work together to help in this effort.

CMPD is dedicated to creating a culture of community policing and engagement, including regular rides through neighborhoods and engaging with people and businesses. "Connect Charlotte", a public safety system that connects privately owned cameras, allows you to register your cameras with the police. If a crime takes place in your area, they can then access your camera to help solve the crime. They do not use the cameras randomly, only if needed. They also work with businesses on a broader basis to integrate cameras with CMPD cameras in real time. This program has had very good success and has recently been vital in solving a homicide because of "Connect Charlotte". Currently, there are 1300 registered cameras, and they'd like to see triple that number.

CMPD is also working with the faith-based community through their chaplains, working with ministers on a program called 30 by 30. They are working with 30 churches to have 30 people praying for CMPD Officers for 30 days. This connection is vital to the CMPD family, and that cooperation and faith are felt and appreciated by the officers. Everyone has heard of "Crime Stoppers", which is the most well-known program to assist law enforcement. "Crime Stoppers" pays for information that leads directly to solving crimes. A "Crime Stoppers" lead led to the apprehension of the woman who stabbed an individual in the parking lot of the grocery store at Cotswold – she was tracked down out of state from leads provided.

Many offenders that CMPD deal with have mental health issues and/or substance abuse issues, and can be repeat offenders. CMPD Officers work closely with local professionals in those areas. When an officer sees someone who needs help, they can assist with getting that help.

However, the most important part of Estella's vision for CMPD is to look inward to our own department. There is currently a shortage of police officers, and that affects morale. They are working aggressively to hire officers, and they are always hiring. Please send anyone you think might be a good candidate to the CMPD! Officers, unfortunately, see more trauma in a short time than most people see in a lifetime. Through partnerships, there are resources available to help pay for counseling, which can be done anonymously. CMPD wants our officers whole! CMPD is also working to enhance officer pay and benefits

So, what can the average person do? Estella encouraged everyone to support and advocate for our police officers. Feel free to thank them personally – they hear it, and it makes a world of difference. CMPD is a department that cares about our community but will always uphold and enforce the law.

Estella then took questions from the gathered crowd:

1. How short-staffed is CMPD? Estella responded that we are short about 250 officers. There are currently 3 classes in process, and robust recruitment stays top of mind. There is a \$5,000 employee referral fee paid to current CMPD officers, which has become a valuable recruitment tool.
2. Another guest asked what we can do to make sure you have the resources you need. Estella appreciated the question and said to advocate for CMPD to be the premier law enforcement agency! We need to be competitive with other cities. She also suggested showing public support for the work they do.
3. Estella was asked about the difference between Raleigh and Charlotte. Estella, of course, loved Raleigh and felt very welcomed by the department and the community. However, Charlotte is home, and she will always love this community. We have challenges, but we work together.
4. A guest asked what anyone can do in a situation like the one that happened on the Lynx, where a young woman was killed. Estella said that voicing your concerns about the situation to lawmakers about mental health and keeping people safe needs to be something that we all hold our leaders accountable for.
5. Estella was asked what outside factors she can't control, like the penal system. Her response was that it's a problem all around. CMPD is short-staffed, the Sheriff has overcrowded jails, prosecutors are overwhelmed with cases, and the penal system is also overcrowded. There is no good solution currently. Arrests are just the start; what we lack are facilities and prosecutors, otherwise offenders are let out early, and the cycle repeats.
6. When asked about homelessness and how CMPD works with those individuals, Estella responded that officers work with area non-profits (shelters, recovery centers, housing needs, etc.). Officers often see issues as they are beginning, and they reach out to non-profits to get people into shelters or homes. There is a fund that allows CMPD to provide a hotel, especially for families, and then we help introduce them to available resources.
7. One guest asked how community engagement and de-escalation work together. CMPD has required training for de-escalation as provided by the FBI (it is also state-mandated). Having

programs in schools that talk to young people about what to do in an encounter with the police has been very helpful.

8. The question was asked about how many people are held in juvenile detention. Estella responded that the Sheriff's office handles all facilities – the juvenile facility is in Cabarrus County, and she is not aware how many young people are housed there.
9. One guest remarked that he lives downtown and just about anytime of day, you smell marijuana, and asked what is being done about that. Estella reminded everyone that marijuana is still illegal in NC, but you wouldn't know it. Officers handle this on a case-by-case basis, mostly through conversation. However, they will make an arrest, especially if they have a firearm or a revoked license. The focus is not allowing people to feel they have an "open license" in public.
10. Lastly, Estella was asked how she decided to become a police officer. After a little laugh, Estella explained that she had no plans to be an officer, but she happened to take an elective course (Criminal Justice 101) in her last year at UNCC, which then led to attending a job fair. She met a female officer who had a similar background, who mentored her. Eventually, Estella became that officer's supervisor. It started with a small spark!

A recording of the meeting can be found here:

Without Slides: <https://vimeo.com/1187752392?fl=pl&fe=sh>

With Slides: <https://vimeo.com/1187752392?fl=pl&fe=sh>

Chief Patterson's introduction begins at approximately 26 minutes.